

This summer, I was a trip leader for Overland Summers, an outdoor education summer camp program that coordinates trips across the US and internationally. With one co-leader, I lead Overland's Service and Hiking New England trips, three 2-week-long trips for 12 high school students. On these trips, I facilitated 30-40 hours of community service activities, such as volunteering at local soup kitchens and food pantries, farming at a community-supported agriculture farm, and completing trail restoration and maintenance on the Massachusetts section of the Appalachian Trail and the Long Trail in Vermont. For each trip, I was the primary risk manager and was responsible for students' well-being 24/7. For many students, this trip was their first experience outdoors hiking and camping, doing community service, or even being away from home. I provided these students with a fun, emotionally and physically safe experience from which they have gained confidence in themselves. Students learned how to be responsible for taking care of themselves without their parents, the impact that they can have on their community, having a positive mindset about new and different experiences, and the value of being present at the moment without their electronics and phones.

Leading outdoor trips of this nature presented me with many challenges. Going into the summer fellowship, I expected to gain experience supporting students through both emotional and physical challenges. Whether a student had homesickness or panic attacks induced by the new environment, I was there to listen to students and support them the best I could. This experience taught me many listening skills necessary to be a validating and supportive teacher and mentor.

Another challenge I faced was building a robust working relationship with my co-leader, Noah. From the start of the summer, Noah and I got along well and enjoyed each other's company. However, during our first trip, our communication was poor, leading to instances of miscommunication that resulted in uncommunicated frustration and interpersonal conflicts. After our first trip, we intensely debriefed our trip, each of us sharing how we felt about leading with

each other and discussing how we could work together to make our leading experience more harmonious. Together, we committed to nightly debriefs where we shared our feelings from the day and constructive feedback for each other on how we could be better leaders, as well as positive praise. With this plan, our working relationship drastically improved for the rest of the summer, creating not only better working conditions for ourselves but also higher-quality trip experiences for our students. From this challenge, I learned the value of consistent communication and trust in the people you work with.

My experience at Overland this summer transformed my career aspirations in the field of education. Prior to this summer, I intended to apply to Harvard's Graduate School of Education Master's in teaching program (TTL) with the intention to work in a city public school system afterward. However, since meeting many other leaders with teaching experience in alternative schools with outdoor missions (ie. Seamester, private schools abroad with outdoor missions, outdoor trips in Korea, and outdoor science education camps for students in California), I have become more interested with what can be interpreted as alternative education pathways. I'm curious about how I could apply my interest and technical expertise in outdoor recreation to science education. While this experience has not drastically altered my intended courses for this year (since I already intended to take many education and science education classes), it has inspired new topics of conversation surrounding outdoor education that I would love to ask my education professors more about. Thank you Harvard Club of cape Cod!